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As I write, there are only a couple of weeks to go to the end of my term as Mayor.

First and foremost, I want to say what a huge honour and privilege it has been to serve the town as its Mayor and Chairman of the Town Council.

The end of this Civic Year also marks the end of the current Town Council and I would like to pay tribute to my fellow councillors, who have freely given up their time to make Whitchurch a better place to live for all of us. I especially thank my Deputy, Councillor Tony Neville, who has been hugely supportive throughout my two years as Mayor.

This report highlights some of the year's achievements. Of course, these achievements would not be possible without the continued efforts of a dedicated staff team—and I thank each and everyone of them for their support, in particular Zoë Dean, who has acted as our Town Clerk since August 2016. I am particularly pleased to welcome Nicki Young, who takes up the post of Town Clerk at the beginning of 17-18 Civic year; previously Community Enablement Officer with Shropshire Council, Nicki is no stranger to the town and will no doubt ensure her infectious energy and enthusiasm takes us from strength to strength.

Over the past two years we have continued strive to review governance procedures and structures to ensure we have a council which is fit for the future. We are also uniquely placed, both geographically and as Shropshire’s oldest and largest market town, to take strategic advantage on the proposed HS2 link in the north of our county, alongside the inevitable inward investment, I would hope, which will benefit us all.

The past two years have also represented a personal journey for me—and an opportunity to appreciate the people and groups who contribute to our dynamic and supportive community. There are simply too many to mention—and that is what sets us apart!
There have been some great times—such as welcoming celebrity chef Rosemary Shrager to our hugely successful Food and Drink Festival or recognising Gwyneth Rollins as our second “Citizen of the Year” … Equally there have been more sombre times, like recognising the sacrifice of the sons and daughters of Whitchurch who gave their lives in the Great War, or the loss of a good friend and council colleague Lester Stones in October 2016.

However, I leave office with pride and a lifetime of memories—I thank you all for that.
The Civic Centre is being overseen this year by a new Committee known as Estates and Markets. It was created in May 2016 after a period when there was no official committee responsible for the building. An urgent early task therefore was to ensure that all our essential safety checks and procedures were up to date and that we were fully compliant. Some of this work is ongoing.

Ideas Workshops were held with members of the public, members of Council Staff and with Councillors, seeking ideas to improve the Civic Centre, reduce our operating costs and extend the range of services we are able to offer to the public. From the 60 ideas generated, a comprehensive Business Plan was drawn up by a Working Party set up to evaluate and implement those ideas.

The Working Party has reviewed and rationalised the room hire rates to create a fairer system with substantially increased overall revenue return. Despite these necessary Changes and a little resistance from some at first, the Civic Centre continues to be an extremely well used facility. The building is still busy from first thing in the morning until late evening with a wide range of commercial and community-led activities. We thank our hirers for remaining with us during the difficult few months when the VAT was in the process of being changed. The Town Council also voted to absorb the VAT costs for coffee mornings in order to keep the set price of £45.00 which was well received by organisers. The Working Party has also led a project to replace all the lighting throughout the Civic Centre main building with LED lighting panels. The project provides significant reductions in our operating costs, it will reduce the carbon footprint of the building and improve the appearance of the rooms. This approved project will be executed through the summer of 2017. The Edward German Room underwent a significant refurbishment throughout January 2017 where the room was plaster boarded, painted and the wooden floor was sanded and re-varnished. This was a long project and we thank our hirers for their patience.

We continue to work alongside Shropshire Council to provide an integrated range of public Council services and information from The Hub. This also serves as a Tourist Information Point, and as the Theatre Box Office. The Civic Centre runs the weekly Friday market in the Market Hall and on the Civic Centre frontage. We liaise with the Makers Market and we are pushing hard to expand the activity of the all the markets, bringing increasing numbers of people into the town on market day, to the benefit of the town’s economy.

Whitchurch Town Council help to fund and organise a range of key town events, including The Spring Fair, The Blackberry Fair, The Whitchurch Food & Drink Festival, The World Wide Whitchurch event and The Christmas Lights Switch on. The Estates & Markets Committee is responsible for the provision and operation of the Christmas Lights, in the last year we were able to add to the scheme, providing more lights for Whitchurch people to enjoy. Whitchurch was also a finalist in the Blachere Christmas Lights competition, held in Colchester, earning £1000 in prize money.
The Strategic Marketing and Events Committee was set up to help improve and move the Civic Centre forward in its awareness of how the facility fits in with the rest of the town and to assist with events. This committee covers marketing, public relations and the Civic Theatre, as well as promoting the facilities that the Civic Centre has to offer and to providing support when promoting the Civic Centre to a wider audience.

The committee recommended that £5,000 was allocated towards next year’s budget to increase advertising for the Civic Centre as a theatre venue and other musical shows. A further budget was also allocated for running a total of twenty shows for the coming year including Abba Revival, Jimmy Cricket and Saturday cinema.

Thanks to this committee the Civic Centre’s gallery now has a display space for the artwork of students from Sir John Talbot’s School. It is hoped that the artwork will continually rotate in order to showcase the talents of young student artists and encourage their families to visit the building and view the display.

LIVE@THECIVIC has been established by the Civic Centre’s Working Party and a new website, dedicated to the theatre, is in operation: www.thecivic.org. When visitors search for the venue they will no longer have to go through the Council’s main website in order to find out details about the venue. This is how professional outlets operate and it is a positive step that the Civic Centre has its own unique branding. The installation of LED screens for advertising in both the foyer and clerk’s office is imminent, following Council approval.

The venue’s first show Abba Revival Tribute night was successful and the event was well supported. Much has been learnt from this first venture and should make future shows and concerts easier to organise from the experience gained. Key to the success of this programme has been the recruitment of a growing band of volunteer helpers who are all kitted out with volunteer T-shirts.
It has been another busy year for the Museum operated by the Whitchurch Museum and Archive volunteers (WMAV) under the leadership of Curator Dr. Judith Hoyle.

After the completion of some internal alterations and fitting out of an environmentally controlled room for document storage, the museum artefacts and archives are now all housed in the Heritage building which makes moving items to and from storage much easier. The allotted part of the park shed has also been fitted out and is in use for large item storage.

The Museum is attracting a steadily rising number of visitors, currently nearly 200 people per month. In addition to this the museum receives many enquiries from abroad from people researching family history – some from as far afield as Australia and Canada. Even more people visit on the Heritage Open Days, which were held on 10th – 11th September, when the WMAV organised the opening of some local historic buildings and popular tours such as climbing to the top of St. Alkmund’s Church tower to get an amazing panorama view of the town. There have also been an encouraging number of good reviews on Trip Advisor. The Museum Facebook page reaches a wide audience and the three websites have many visitors.

This year the WMAV have gained five additional, competent volunteers, increasing the number of researchers, who are working on many different projects on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and stewards who man the opening of the Museum on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

**Donations & Acquisitions**
- A Whitchurch made pocket watch from the 1840s
- Whitchurch Alport football trophies from 1970s
- 19th century sale auction poster
- 1850s Whitchurch watch movement
- Commemorative china
- 1832 framed citation for Whitchurch solicitor
- WW1 medals belonging to Captain John German Harrison
- WW1 medals for Private A E Evans

**Display**
- A WW1 communications wagon has been installed as a new exhibit in the Museum.
- A war memorial display has been created featuring towns and villages local to Whitchurch.
- A Community display unit has been created where local people & organisations can display their collections for an agreed period of time.
Activities
The names of all of the soldiers who fought in the WW1 are now listed online
A coffee morning was held at Tilstock in order to collect WW1 items and professionally scan photographs and another coffee morning was held in Marbury.
A Junior School visit was hosted in July
The volunteers held a stall for 2 days at the Canal Festival in August.
A talk was given by volunteers to the local Hear Here Group in September
A special Saturday Opening was held for Blackberry Fair in October
There was a late night opening on 24th November 2016 in support of ‘Explore your Archive week, which is a national event.
The Museum was open for a full day on Saturday 26th November to celebrate the town’s Christmas lights switch on.
In January the Museum hosted a WHAG afternoon talk, with over thirty people in attendance.
The annual deep clean of the building in took place in January as per Museum Accreditation guidelines.
There was a Special Wednesday opening for Chester U3A group on March 1st
Currently the Museum is hosting the Family History Group every Friday.
The group continue to catalogue the research documents from the late local historian, Mrs Joan Barton.

Training
Two volunteers attended a course at Cosford ‘Workshops & Advisory Sessions’
One volunteer attended ‘Broadening Digital Horizons Training’ in order to produce a digital trail for the Heritage Centre. Two free smart phones were awarded as part of the package.
A presentation of this trail was made at the Ironbridge Regional Museum Conference in March.

The WMAV are currently considering whether to take on a lease so they can formally take over the running of the Museum.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to all of the volunteers for all the effort and hard work they have put into producing interesting displays and involving the community, to make the Museum and Archives a growing success.

Since the four craft units were renamed the Heritage Courtyard Shops and repainted, the shops, three of the units are now occupied. The smallest, final unit, is now available.
After another successful year, with our tree planting programme we are starting to see the benefits as the trees are maturing. Thanks to Nobridge’s winter bulb planting programme in areas of the park that have previously been very plain, have this year, reflected a vibrant show of snowdrops, crocuses and bluebells.

The Town Council’s parks contractor Nobridge must be acknowledged for an excellent year in maintaining the parks to such a high standard and the vibrant floral displays. The hanging baskets and floral planters last year were particularly stunning, this was due to the larger baskets which were used. More baskets were also incorporated into the scheme in order to include as many areas of the town centre as possible, including Watergate Arcade. The rose walk in Jubilee Park has been planted with 150 English fragranced roses at no cost to the Council.

In September 2016 ten pieces of outdoor gym equipment were installed in Jubilee Park to form a fitness circuit. The money for the project was predominantly provided by lottery funding.

The Harry Richards Ornamental Garden has been extended and it is now very well established with a new flower bed and it is hoped that a number of cherry trees will be planted during the next council year in order to provide more colour and vibrancy in this area. The list of play equipment repairs has been thoroughly worked through over the winter period, maintaining safe facilities safe and enjoyable areas for children to enjoy.

As Chairman, I am very pleased to report that Gambrell Avenue play area has now been re-opened with replacement swings, a springer and other necessary repairs. Plans are also afoot to extend the children's main play area in Jubilee Park.

Unfortunately there is some negative news to report. In the February storms Jubilee Park lost four well established trees, two of which were Horse Chestnuts and these were the oldest trees in the park. It is hoped that at some stage during the winter planting process that two mature trees may be obtained in order to replace these.
Largely due to the uncertainty of ongoing negotiations with Shropshire Council regarding the future of the Civic Centre and other possible service transfers, it has been a financial year of uncertainty. However, it has been possible to maintain all existing services within the current budget, at the same time as tenants of the Civic Centre carrying out necessary maintenance and repairs.

Due to VAT regulations it was deemed appropriate to regulate hire charges to attract VAT. Thanks to the loyalty of our hirers this does not seem to have adversely undermined the hire income which, once again, has exceeded our budget.

Local organisations have this year benefitted from grants in excess of £8,000 and all suitably qualified applicants will be considered to share in the 2017/2018 allocation.

Wages are always a significant cost to the Council in order to maintain all Town Council services across the board. However, the Council has acknowledged the loyalty and dedication of all staff with enhanced pay awards.

Significant sums of money have been used, or set aside in ear-marked reserves, to enhance the Civic Centre and promote its facilities with outside groups and members working hard to bring shows and entertainment to wider audiences. Ultimately, these efforts will generate much needed income and negate the reliance on the precept.

Whitchurch made it to the finals of the Blachere Revive and Thrive Christmas Lights Competition, Acting Town Clerk Zoë Dean and Community Enablement Officer Nicki Young attended the conference in Colchester and presented to a panel of expert judges.
Whitchurch Town Team
Annual Report 2017

Whitchurch Town Team is a committee working to enhance the town in line with the actions from the Town Plan 2011. This is available on www.whitchurch.info.

Since the last Town Meeting the Town Team has met formally seven times to take note of developments in the town. However most of the work is done outside of these formal meetings. Members of the Town Team are engaged with partners who can help us to complete actions from the Action Plan.

The Town Team is hoping to work closely with the new Town Council as partners in the process.

The New Plan Working Group has been meeting more regularly to move forward with the Plan refresh. Members visited Grinshill to see how their team is working and consulting with the residents. Shropshire Council is refreshing the County Plan and we have been in consultation with officers about how the Plan for Whitchurch can continue to be complementary to the Unitary Authority Plan.

The first public consultation took place last summer when everyone was invited to fill in a questionnaire either in paper form or online. The NPWG has been collecting data and discussing how these aspirations may best be accomplished.

The second phase of the refresh will be a display at the Party in the Park on Saturday 3\textsuperscript{rd} June from 1pm. On this occasion you will be able to look at some planned actions and to comment upon them. You will also be able to ask the Group to consider other ideas. The display will be located in the big marquee so please come along and have your say.
Mayor and Chairman
Mike McDonald MA, CMgr FCMI, FRSA, CiPFA (Afil)

Deputy Mayor
Tony Neville

Councillors
Alan Chesters
Bev Duffy
Ticker Harris
Rob Hewson
Jessica McAuley
Terry O’Neill
Malcolm Rigley
John Sinnott
Brooke Slater
Chris Smith

Acting Town Clerk
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Keep up to date with our news and vacancies online!